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ABSTRACT

The increase in adult, minority, women, part-time, and displaced students attending community colleges has caused the roles of community college counselors to shift from an "in loco parentis" emphasis on personal counseling, vocational guidance and social support to new roles as student developers and learning agents. As student developers, counselors must communicate the importance of academic skill-building, and help students understand the value of their academic endeavors. As learning agents, counselors must assist, manage, and encourage students to build a pattern of success. (TE)

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HIGHLIGHTS ...An ERIC/CAPS Digest

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The Emerging Role of the Community College Counselor

Overview

The changing characteristics of students attending community colleges and the decline in financial support for community colleges have redefined the role of counseling in the community college. In the 1950s and 1960s, counselors served an "in loco parentis" role (Leach, 1984), providing personal counseling, vocational guidance, and social support for the traditional community college student. In the 1970s and 1980s, ethnic minorities, older women, part-time students, and displaced workers began enrolling in community colleges. To meet the needs of these new students, community colleges are reinstating testing and placement, dismissal and probation policies, general education requirements, and select admissions programs.

The emerging role of counseling involves helping students to complete their academic objectives; the reduction of student attrition is a priority. Counselors must perform the roles of student developers and learning agents (Noel & Levitz, 1984). As the student devalopers, counselors must communicate to students the importance of skill building and other academic requirements and help them understand the value of their academic endeavors. As learning agents, counselors must assist, manage, and encourage students to build a pattern of success. Crucial characteristics that community college counselors need to be successful include a strong sense of professional mission, rapport, and empathy. Community college counselors must serve as student advocates and promote strategies for increasing minority student retention. The increase in non-traditional students coupled with a decrease in resources forces counselors to take more cost effective approaches to their counseling.

Student Developers

As student developers, counselors should assume the responsibility of communicating to students the importance of academics in vivid and realistic terms. The goals for the student developer should be to provide counseling, information, and support services to meet the students' developmental needs. The objectives should be as follows:

- To assist each interested student in making informed and realistic decisions in the areas of educational and career choices.
- To provide services that reflect the understanding that student development includes social, intellectual, psychological, and ethical development.
- To provide credit courses, seminars, group discussions, and one-on-one opportunities to assist in making realistic career and educational decisions.

A useful activity for the student developer is to design courses to help entering students define why they are in college, determine what they want from the college experience, and correlate their educational goals with career selection. These courses can benefit students by improving their retention, increasing their internalized locus of control, and enhancing intrinsic motivation (Mitchell & Young, 1979). According to Mitchell and Young (1979), these courses should be structured with sequential units providing information and exercises which require students to:

1. Familiarize themselves with college services in the area of advisement, financial aid, career planning, counseling, library resources, and job placement;
2. Assess their academic skills and weaknesses;
3. Learn to allocate their time effectively;
4. Articulate their expectation of the college and their tentative career choices;
5. Delineate their educational goals;
6. Establish a plan to achieve these goals;
7. Select relevant courses; and,
8. Develop a tentative schedule for the following semester.

Learning Agents

As a learning agent, the counselor is required to assist, manage, and encourage students to build a pattern of success. To be effective in this role, the counselor should be a central part of the primary intake and processing services such as registration, advising, orientation, test interpretation, and career planning. According to Lowe (1980), students receiving preregistration counseling had more satisfaction with their initial program of study and withdrew at a lower rate than non-counseled groups. In addition,

> Students receiving only perfunctory counseling had significantly more program changes, withdrew at a higher rate, and failed to return for the second quarter at a higher rate than did the students who underwent preregistration counseling. (Lowe, 1980)

Counselor services should meet the needs of those entering students by providing each student complete information and preparation for entry into appropriate courses. Some of the viable activities include:

1. Assessing student ability by using placement tests and interest inventories;
2. Assisting in establishing or clarifying education and career goals; and,
3. Helping students use college resources to meet their expectations.

Creative approaches for the learning agent can also have the counselor working with prospective college students before they enroll in the institution. They can offer and

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participate in life planning and career decision-making seminars to assist individuals in making decisions about future career and educational options and also prepare an overall plan concerning their future goals for living (Pulliams, 1989). These seminars and workshops can be offered to prospective students throughout the community at community junior and senior high schools, GED programs, churches, and community-based organizations.

Minority students are a critical population for the learning agent. They are more likely to live in poor socioeconomic conditions, less likely to have solid college preparatory experiences, and are more often subjected to factors that unduly interfere with their academic achievement and personal development. Seerley (1985) describes a program providing a satisfying intake process for this population. The program was designed to invite each student to participate, ensure they were aware of the services available at the college, provide special help situations and opportunities, focus on retention, and have each participant maintain a 2.00 GPA.

Effective community college counselors must possess certain crucial characteristics in order to be successful learning agents (Keller, 1983). One of the most important will be a strong sense of professional mission. Involved in this sense of mission should be a drive to help others and the belief that students can achieve all that they are capable of becoming. Now more than ever, rapport, the ability to develop favorable relationships with staff and students, will be mandatory for the new counseling role. Counselors will also have to possess empathy, the ability to understand what students are experiencing. A special perception of students will be needed by counselors: the ability to think in terms of the individual students and how their individual strengths and needs can be accommodated and tied into the challenges of the institution.

Cost Effectiveness and Resource Management

A decline in financial support for community colleges caused by cutbacks from federal, state, and local funding complements the aforementioned community college population changes. Consequently, the future role of counseling must address the challenge of reviewing traditional counseling activities and addressing the needs of the "new" community college population. It will also demand more careful managing of current personnel and fiscal resources and even an integrated organizational approach when community college counselors use community-based organizations for operational support.

Careful management of resources means that there must be more use of cost effective approaches for counseling. Some of the methods that should be considered are:

1. Expanding counseling services by establishing linkages with other service professionals within the college and the community.
2. Setting up cost effective personnel resources such as volunteer corps, peer counselors, and paraprofessionals.
3. Examining the establishment of fees for some services.
4. Reviewing counseling services each year to examine effectiveness and readjusting those services as needed.
5. Becoming familiar with new resource management approaches through professional organizations' workshops and seminars.

As part of the cost effective delivery of counseling services, computer software and hardware are playing more critical roles. Viable and appropriate computer utilization is becoming more common. Computers are especially useful in providing occupational and educational information to students.

Evening and part-time students place additional pressure on counseling resources. Creamer (1979) focuses on serving this group through the use of the following activities: self-help materials and activities; noncredit courses to deliver counseling services; and a collaboration among selected professionals to deal with the problem of counseling part-time and evening students.

Summary

The emerging role of community college counseling is actually an expansion of traditional roles: Community college counselors are becoming learning agents, student developers, and resource managers. This expansion of responsibilities is being activated by the influx of "new," nontraditional college students into the nation's community colleges and by declining resources caused by internal budget reductions and declining support from governmental sources.

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